
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
COMMERCE

NEWS

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20230

NATIONAL
OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC
ADMINISTRATION

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NOAA04-R176
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Dec. 1, 2004

RIGHT WHALE FOUND DEAD ON NORTH CAROLINA BEACH
Federal Agency Investigating Cause

NOAA Fisheries is investigating the death of a pregnant female North Atlantic right whale found beached last week. Preliminary results from an examination of the carcass indicate that the animal likely died from blood loss owing to a massive wound to the left tail fluke, probably caused by a ship strike. NOAA Fisheries is the federal agency charged with recovering and protecting marine mammals in U.S. waters. NOAA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, is an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

The whale was found dead in Ocean Sands, N.C. on November 24, missing the left lobe of its tail fluke. "We are awaiting the full necropsy results and analyses," said Dr. Teri Rowles, who leads NOAA Fisheries' National Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Network.

A necropsy was performed on the beach in Ocean Sands November 25-27 by mammal researchers from the Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center and University of North Carolina-Wilmington. Both institutions are partners in the agency's marine mammal stranding network and part of the large whale investigation team.

"Through their hard work during a holiday, a large number of samples and data were collected from this whale that will help us determine the circumstances surrounding its death," said Rowles.

The whale has been identified through the New England Aquarium right whale catalog as #1909, born in 1989 and most recently sighted off the southeastern U.S. in 2003.

On November 17, the Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center received a report from a recreational fisherman of a bleeding large whale that was alive, but missing a portion of its fluke. On November 18, a U.S. Coast Guard C-130 with observers aboard surveyed a 500 sq. mile area around the sighting location. Despite good visibility, the animal was not resighted.

On November 22, NOAA Fisheries received a report from the Navy describing a strike on a whale that had occurred on November 17. “We are talking with the Navy to learn more about a strike they reported Nov. 22,” said Rowles.

Ship strikes and entanglement in fishing gear are two of the known human-caused threats to these animals.

NOAA Fisheries is dedicated to providing and preserving the nation’s living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management, and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation’s coastal and marine resources.

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NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

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